The Gospel And Gifts - A Plea for Diversity (I Cor. 12:1-30)

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Like 26

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I don't intend to go verse by verse through the whole chapter tonight. And I won't go in detail through the list of gifts, explaining each gift, what it is, and how it functions. If you weren't around when Sam did his series on Spiritual Gifts that did that, or haven't heard it, I encourage you to listen to it. You can listen here. And for the *really* nerdy, I dumped some academic resources on Spiritual Gifts with links into a blog post here. My plan tonight is to briefly overview I Corinthians 12, distill some basic principles from it, and apply them to what we are facing today, in ways that I pray are Spirit led.

I Cor. 12-14 of course cover spiritual gifts, but what Paul writes he writes to respond to the abuses of the gifts that have been happening at Corinth. This is a church that is astoundingly immature, and yet one of the most gifted churches in the NT (1:7). They are marked by divisions, immorality, and some very misshapen eschatology. They seem to have assumed that there were different "classes" of Christians. That some are more "spiritual" than others. Together with this, they seem to have assumed that certain gifts were markers or signs of what it meant to be more spiritual. They were thus emphasizing the more spectacular gifts, specifically tongues. They seem to think tongues is a sign of being more spiritual (maybe thinking that it means they are speaking the language of heaven, and thus the tongues-speaker is more "heavenly."). Tongues has thus come to dominate the Corinthian meetings. All of 12-14 will address this, but in three parts. In chapter 12 Paul builds a general theology of Gifts, in 13 he relativizes all the gifts to love. No particular gift is a mark of spirituality, nor any mark of maturity. Rather, it is by mature christian character, and love for God and man, that one displays Christian growth. Gifts without love are less than worthless - they are dangerous. In 14 he finally comes specifically to their abuse of tongues, and uses the contrast of prophecy to urge them to prefer gifts in the assembly that best serve others. Gordon Fee explains well;

> The problem is almost certainly an abuse of the charisma of tongues. This is made clear first of all by the structure of the argument itself, which is basically in three parts, following the A-B-A pattern noted in previous sections10 (and basically corresponding to our current chapter divisions). Thus the argument begins with a more general, descriptive presentation (chap. 12), which is followed by a theological interlude (chap. 13) and concludes with a very specific response to the matter in hand (chap. 14).
>
> ...the correctives are all aimed at the abuse of tongues in the assembly, which seems to have been both singular in its emphasis and disorderly in its expression (cf. 14:12, 23, 33, 40).
>
> Since this is unquestionably the focus at the end (chap. 14), it is reasonable to assume that what precedes (chaps. 12 and 13) leads to these correctives. Thus, after setting forth the basic criterion for distinguishing between what belongs to the Spirit and what does not (12:1–3), Paul begins (12:4–30) by emphasizing the need for diversity of gifts and manifestations in the unity of the one Spirit. That is the clear concern at the beginning (vv. 4–11), as well as the major note struck both in the analogy of the body that follows (vv. 12–26) and in the concluding reiteration (vv. 27–30). This emphasis is best understood vis-à-vis the Corinthians' apparently singular enthusiasm for tongues.
>
> It should be noted at this point that only tongues is included in every list of "gifts" in these three chapters. Its place at the conclusion of each list in the presenting argument (chap. 12), but at the beginning in two later passages (13:1 and 14:6), suggests that the problem lies here. It is listed last, however, not because it is "least," but because it is where the problem lies. Paul always includes it, but in each case only after the greater concern for diversity has been heard.
> - Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Revised Edition, NICNT, 632–634.

Some have read this chapter as a plea for *unity*, and there is a sense in which that is true. Unity comes up at points. But in light of the full context, and a clear understanding of what is going on in the background, it is more accurate to describe this chapter as a plea for *diversity* in the body. The Corinthian problem surely evidenced a lack of unity. But at a this point it was a lack of unity due to a lack of diversity, and Paul starts here with the latter. So to chapter 12;

12:1-3 - The Christian Confession is the Test Only of who has the Spirit

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.
1 Co 12:1–3.

Paul's point isn't to suggest that anyone was cursing Jesus in the church, nor is it to give a criteria for how to test prophesies, or how to test anything else. His point is simply to show that the whole world falls into only two groups; those who make the Christian confession, who have the Spirit, and those who don't. The Gospel divides Christian from non-Christian, but also thus unifies all Christians together. There is no "second class Christian." All believers have the same Spirit. Fee explains;

> At first reading this opening paragraph seems quite unrelated to the topic at hand; nonetheless, Paul is here setting the stage for much that follows. Despite some notorious difficulties for later readers in the second and third sentences (vv. 2 and 3), one thing seems certain: His initial concern is to set their former experience as idolaters in contrast with their present experience as Christians, who speak "by the Spirit of God."

Gordon D. Fee, NICNT, 637.

12:4-11 - Diversity is Inherent in the Gifts Because Diversity is Inherent in the Godhead

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.
1 Co 12:4–11.

Paul explains here that God's intention was for a diversity of Gifts in the church. This stands over agains the Corinthian tendency to make Tongues the most important gift, and maybe even to urge that all should speak it. While they wanted to democratize a single gift, and thus end up with *uniformity*, Paul instead urges *diversity*. And he grounds this theologically in the most profound way - *God is a Trinity in Unity and a Unity in Trinity.* There is both unity and diversity inherent in the Godhead, and thus, there must be a diversity in the gifts that are sovereignly given by the one Spirit in the unified body.

This also helps us to realize that the issues surrounding the spiritual gifts are about God *himself*. Spiritual gifts are ways that God manifest his own presence in the body of Christ. They are not some "thing" distinct from God in some deistic fashion. Sam Storms explains;

> There's a crucial principle we need to understand from the outset: Spiritual gifts are not God bestowing to his people something external to himself. They are not some tangible "stuff" or "substance" separable from God. Spiritual gifts are nothing less than God himself in us, energizing our souls, imparting revelation to our minds, infusing power in our wills, and working his sovereign and gracious purposes through us. Spiritual gifts must never be viewed deistically, as if a God "out there" has sent some "thing" to us "down here". Spiritual gifts are God present in, with, and through human thoughts, human deeds, human words, and human love.
> - Sam Storms, *Biblical Studies: 1 Corinthians 12–14,* 1 Co 12:4–7.

12:12-14 - Diversity in the Human Body and in your Backgrounds Urges Diversity in the Church

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.
14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many.
1 Co 12:12–14.

Paul now grounds his plea for diversity in a two-fold reality. First, he introduces the metaphor of a human body that he will develop throughout the rest of the chapter. Second, he explains (as he often does - Gal. 3:28, etc.) that they have come to Christ from diverse backgrounds, diverse ethnicities, diverse cultures, diverse social standings, diverse genders, etc. Yet in the gospel all are welcomed, and differences are relativized in light of the common gospel. "Verses 13–14 give a twofold rationale for permitting diversity within unity: (1) those who are being saved come from all ethnic and socioeconomic brackets of the ancient world; and (2) that is how a human body works" (Craig Blomberg, 1 Corinthians).

The Church always faces a strong tendency to resist biblical diversity; to settle for a kind of *uniformity* instead of unity. Unity can in fact only happen where there is diversity. Remove diversity, and there is no possibility for unity. Yet many churches trade unity for uniformity as a cheap substitute. Chris Smith points out the difference between conflict (which is sinful), and disagreement (which is natural, and not sinful). He then paints a picture of what happens when a church settles for uniformity instead of unity, demanding that everything think the same, and allowing no difference;

> Too many churches remain shallow and immature because they go to great lengths to avoid the tiniest semblance of disagreement. Authoritarian leadership—whether exercised by an individual or by a group—is one way churches attempt to avoid conversation and its tendency to reveal disagreement. Authoritarian leaders lay down the law and then seek to punish or cut off those who cannot abide by their law. This sort of leadership imposes a sharp order on a world that is not nearly so neat (recall our exploration of the prevalence of messiness in chap. 6).
> - Smith, C. Christopher. *How the Body of Christ Talks,* p. 149.

Blomberg makes a similar point;

> Verse 13, like Galatians 3:28, also reminds us of the crucial need in every age for the church to model heterogeneous groupings that cause the world to marvel at our unity within diversity (cf. Eph. 4:4–11). Church should be a place where people gather and get along with each other who have no merely human reason for doing so.
> - Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, NIVAC, 252.

Naturally, there are ditches on both sides of the road here in some ways. Some would sacrifice the gospel itself on the alter of "unity," and de-emphasize or even let go of the core and foundational beliefs which make up the Christian gospel. But on the other side, some groups have a tendency to make virtually everything an "essential" that must be believed and held to in order for fellowship to take place. For such groups, fellowship is no longer based on the Christian gospel, but on their much less important "distinctives." Roger Olson, when contrasting and critiquing a few different confessions in later "fundamentalism," points out that in the more stringent element, "Little room is left for opinion or interpretation. All true Christians will think exactly alike on virtually every point of doctrine, lifestyle, sociopolitical thought and virtually everything else" (*The Story of Christian Theology*, p. 565).

D. A. Carson and Tim Keller, in the core documents of "The Gospel Coalition," explain well this "two-ditch" understanding, and their passion to stay centered on the Gospel;

> ...we are united by the conviction that what unites us—the doctrinal core components of the gospel—is far more important than what divides us. On the one hand, that conviction differentiates us from those who believe that there is no gospel to preach apart from the distinctions of their tradition. They do not think that their denominational distinctives are “secondary.” On the other hand, that conviction differentiates us from those who would rather define evangelicalism only in sociological or experiential terms and who would therefore not make such a robust doctrinal confessional statement the basis for fellowship and cooperation.
> - Keller, *The Gospel as Center*

I love how the elders at Bridgeway Church have explained the purpose of their full doctrinal statement, in a way that seeks to avoid both of these ditches;

> We believe that it is best and most biblical not to discover how little can be believed simply to get by, or to find the lowest common denominator of doctrine around which all can gather, but to elevate the fullness of biblical truth and to teach and hold fast to the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

While avoiding arrogant and divisive dogmatism on secondary issues, we do believe that the Bible speaks clearly on the essential concepts of the Christian faith and that it is our responsibility to proclaim "the good doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:6) and to "guard the good deposit" (2 Tim. 1:14) entrusted to us. That is why we have undertaken to define as clearly as possible what we believe to be the foundational principles of the Scriptures.

We do not believe that every article in this statement of faith is of equal importance. Some are considerably more essential than others. Thus we do not believe that every doctrine stated below must be believed in order for someone to be saved.

It should also be understood that this statement of faith is not a requirement for people who attend Bridgeway, as if to suggest that disagreement with any particular assertion disqualifies a person from being actively engaged in the ministries of this local body of believers. We welcome and embrace all who believe in and follow the Lord Jesus Christ, whether or not they can affirm every article of faith in this statement. We welcome and embrace all who are still searching for spiritual truth and have not yet acknowledged Jesus as Lord and Savior. The purpose of this declaration of doctrinal beliefs is to make known where Bridgeway stands on issues of supreme importance to Christian faith and life. These are the biblical and theological truths and boundaries that will be honored by those who teach and preach at Bridgeway, whether on Sunday morning at our corporate celebrations, in our community groups, children's ministry, formal classroom settings, or any other expression of life and training. Whereas we recognize that differences of opinion and interpretation may exist among the people of this local church, and that robust, yet humble, discussion and debate on these matters is spiritually healthy, nothing contrary to this statement of faith will be either publicly or privately promoted.

We do not claim perfection for this statement of faith. God's Word alone is inerrant and infallible, not our interpretations of it. Thus we will always be open to correction from Scripture and will refine this statement as the Spirit teaches and guides us.

12:15-20 - Every Member of a Body is a Unique Individual

15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.
1 Co 12:15–20.

All of us have a yearning deep within us to find and be our unique selves. The God who crafted every snowflake unique did not lose his creative flair when he created you. The age of youth is often, rightly, a time of finding out who we are, what we like and love, what our passions are. This deep yearning is designed by God to drive us to the Gospel, so that in God and his gifting of us we find our truly unique self. Paul explains that God has designed the church, like the body, to be composed of diverse parts, each unique to themselves. Every part has a role to play, and no one part is the whole.

"The God who crafted every snowflake unique did not lose his creative flair when he created you."
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Paul is showing us that the Gospel meets this need, and that the church is to be a place which encourages and welcomes individual expression. I love the way our church expresses its Vision;

> Vision
> "We earnestly desire to be a diverse spiritual family united by the Gospel that longs for God's presence and power in every dimension of our lives. Through his grace we continually seek to grow deeper in intimacy with Christ and go farther with him on mission. We pray that our dedication to both Word and Spirit would result in commissioned disciples, passionate worship, heartfelt love for God and one another, miraculous ministry, and joyful satisfaction in all that God is for us in Jesus."

And I especially love how we articulate our value of honor;

> "As a diverse spiritual family, we are committed to honoring and encouraging one another in love, service, and humility, exhorting each other to hate evil and pursue good, as we strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

12:21-26 - Every Member of a Body is Part of a Unified Whole, Inter-dependant on Each Other

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.
1 Co 12:21–26.

Two conclusions flow from the reality that the body is a unified whole consisting of interdependent parts;

First - No One Gift Can Alone Dominate

On the one hand, God has designed the body so that we each need the other parts. We all need each other. No one gift can rise to dominate, all need each other. Churches or groups that allow a single spiritual gift to be the dominant (or even only) expression of service evidence an extreme lack of health that is as dangerous as having surgery to replace every organ in your body with a single massive organ. This is inherently deeply unhealthy, yet it is the shape of many modern churches, fellowships, and groups today. What happens when we lose diversity, and one gift alone comes to dominate? I'd suggest there are several ways this can take place;

- Missions - Some churches / groups make *missions* the main or even only thing. I love the *Perspectives* Class we sometimes offer at Bridgeway. But one danger we need to watch out for is coming out of that class and now assuming that missions to Unreached People Groups is "the" mission of the church, as though anyone not doing this, or not doing it our way, is some kind of second class Christian. Or as though someone serving in this way is now serving the "highest" ministry, and anyone involved in something else is thus involved in something "less." Apostolic gifts (in the lesser sense of that word meaning "pioneer church planters,") may be *chronologically* first, but they are not more important than other gifts. They are an essential *part* of the body and its necessary functions. But they are not the *whole* of it.

- Preaching - Some churches / circles make *preaching* the highest or most important thing. They speak of "the primacy of preaching," and it's not unusual to hear them say things like, "every Christian is either called to preach, or to serve a preacher." All other gifts are subordinate to this one expression. (Some might seek to ground such a claim in chapter 14, but that is both to miss the point of Paul's contrast between prophecy and uninterrupted tongues, and to mistakenly equate "preaching" with NT prophecy, which are surely not the same.) They have committed virtually the exact same mistake that Corinth did - they have over-elevated one gift above all the others. To be sure, this is not as dangerous as elevating tongues (because tongues is unintelligible, unless interpreted, while preaching is not). But while less immediately *damaging*, it is no less *unhealthy*. Nothing could be further from Paul's own understanding. Preaching of the word of God is absolutely essential to the health of the body. But it is *one gift* within the body, it is not *the whole* of the body. A Church or a fellowship where Preaching is everything is as ugly as a body made up only of an eye. (Think Mike Wazowski from *Monsters Inc.*). As Paul explains, "And if they were all one member, where were the body?" (1 Co 12:19). Gardner sounds this warning;

  > Often in those churches that put so much emphasis on teaching and preaching that other gifts may be considered second-rate or even irrelevant, gifts are hardly being allowed to function in their great diversity for the building up of the people. On the other hand, many other churches put so much emphasis on the more extraordinary gifts, such as tongues or healing, that they too suffer as they fail to benefit from the wide and diverse gifting of all church members....If Joel 2:28–32 (cf. Acts 2:17–18) is truly fulfilled in and among the people of the new covenant, then they should be rejoicing in what has been poured out upon them and enabling one another to use their gifts that all may benefit. Whether this will be done in plenary times of worship, when time seems always to be limited, or in smaller home-style gatherings, or simply in small groups or one-to-one encounters, is not the issue. The issue is that God's Spirit has endowed each member of his church with gifts, and most churches rarely even know what they are, let alone seek to find ways of ensuring all are "built up" by one another as God has willed for them. The several lists in the New Testament of various such gifts reinforce the challenge. It is especially notable that three other lists of gifts (outside 1 Corinthians) do not arise in situations where they are being abused or where they have led to any form of pride or elitism. Each list takes it for granted that a unified body is strengthened by the multiplicity of gifts that God has given it. Thus we may note Romans 12:3–8; Ephesians 4:1–16; 1 Peter 4:8–11.
  > - Paul Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, ZECNT, 555.

- Compassion/Social justice - Some churches make *social ministry* the highest thing. Men and women with gifts of compassion, mercy, and service, who deeply feel the need to be involved in serving and helping the needy, cluster around one another, and could easily grow judgmental of groups or churches that aren't as "involved" in such work as they are. Surely, the church in the Western world has often lost the NT vision for social involvement. I found Carl Henry's work, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* deeply convicting at this point years ago, as I began to hear the call to social justice contained in the gospel. I commend it to you. But while social work is an important *part* of the service of the church, it is one body part, not the *whole*.

- Tongues - Some groups have made *tongues* a necessary mark of Spirit-Baptism. In some very rare and extreme cases, some have even said that only those who have spoken in tongues are saved (this is extremely rare, but it has happened). In much larger contexts, some Pentecostal circles claim that anyone who has not spoken in tongues has not been baptized in the Spirit. Yet for Paul, tongues is not a sign of anything. And while the issue is complex and controversial, I think Paul is clear that not all believers will speak in tongues. He seems to clearly say that there is no gift that every Christian will or must have.

> All of Paul's emphasis on diversity within unity gives the lie to those extreme wings of the charismatic movement that continue to claim that a person must speak in tongues (or experience prophecy, healing, or whatever) in order to be saved or to be spiritually mature. That same emphasis equally betrays the imbalance among zealous advocates for evangelism or missions as the most fundamental task of the church. Continuing elevation of clergy over laity remains similarly inappropriate.
> - Craig Blomberg, 1 Corinthians, The NIV Application Commentary, 254.

- Evangelism - In some churches, mostly those who have adopted the patterns of the North American Church Growth Movement, there is the danger that *evangelism* to the lost (an essential priority for any church) can become "the" preeminent factor. How the service is designed, and all that the church does, can too easily come to be shaped by this one gift. In some expressions, because it allows evangelism to happen faster and more broadly, churches are designed after a homogeneous model that has the danger of losing the very variety of culture that Paul demands is inherent in the gospel itself. Blomberg sounds that warning;

  > Diversity within unity seriously challenges those prevailing models of church growth that stress homogeneous grouping principles. Perhaps at certain foundational levels, outreach and fellowship occur best among those most like ourselves. But the most dynamic evangelistic power of the gospel comes when the world is forced to sit up and take notice that people are loving each other in ways it cannot account for with humanistic presuppositions. In America, this is especially true when blacks and whites worship and work together for the Lord. Yet, what Martin Luther King, Jr., often observed still proves true—11:00 on Sunday morning remains the most segregated hour of American life. Here is one of the most tragic indictments against contemporary Christendom within almost every ethnic group...
  >
  > In a day when more and more "worship services" are being turned into soft-sell evangelism in "seeker-sensitive" styles, the need for accompanying "Sunday School" or its equivalent, with a solid teaching component, becomes all the more acute. More traditional churches that continue to major on "in-house" teaching need to be encouraged to supplement their work with a greater focus on church-planting and evangelistic proclamation.
  > - Craig Blomberg, 1 Corinthians, The NIV Application Commentary, pg. 255–257.

The reality is, anytime we elevate one gift above all the rest (regardless of what gift that is), and the church becomes shaped accordingly, we commit the Corinthian error all over again, and we end up quenching the Spirit and the ways he has gifted others in the body. We inadvertently stunt the way he desires to work through them and their gifting. *The body desperately needs every part*, and the church at large desperately needs every gift, and every gifted member. We must fight against the temptations to uniformity, and never settle for anything less than true gospel-shaped unity through diversity.

Let me say a word too about the larger, universal body. Most of this post is aimed at the local church (and I think most of Paul's chapter is as well), urging each body to be more diverse. But we must ask these same questions from the perspective of the whole body of Christ as well. From this angle, it is often appropriate to have certain convictions, and it's appropriate to have denominational distinctives. Your group may value miraculous gifts, and so you group around others who do as well. Or your group may value expository preaching, and so you gather around those who share your passions. Arguably, this makes those within each group better at the things in which they specialize, and that can be ok.

As long as you recognize that you are one part of a larger body, and that the things you have made your emphasis do not need to be (in fact, should not be) the focus of the whole body.

You've stockpiled every sermon by every great preacher on your iPad? Great. Don't demand that everyone else do the same. You've spent a dozen hours this week in intercession? So awesome. Allow that not every Christian has that calling. You led 20 people to Jesus in the past year? I couldn't be more happy. Don't expect everyone to do the same.

Learn to allow, recognize, and value the parts of the body of Christ that do things differently than you do. You may not even realize it, but you desperately need them to fill your lack, just as much as they need you. That's what it means to be small parts of larger Body.

Second - No One Christian Can Do It Alone

If the first error of allowing one gift to dominate is dangerous, no less dangerous is the second, the *individualistic* error, which abandons all need for the body and for others. "Just me and Jesus," someone says, revealing that they have little or no understanding of the Gospel. God created us to need one another in community. The notion, all too common in the Western world, that we can develop a "personal relationship with Jesus," as though this were some thing we could do alone by ourselves in a cave somewhere, has nothing to do with the New Testament.

> Body parts are interdependent, not independent of each other. The New Testament recognizes no individual or "lone-ranger" Christians who are not attached to some local Christian fellowship. That is not to say it is impossible to be saved and uninvolved, merely that it is unhealthy. In societies where individualism is valued above corporate responsibility, the importance of the metaphor of Christ's church as a body looms large. Paul's emphasis on all of us needing every other believer greatly relativizes any hierarchy of status, rank, or privilege that we might otherwise try to establish. If there is to be any disparity in the amount of honor accorded anyone, then the less visible, less publicly

acknowledged gifts, such as helping, service, or giving, merit greater acclaim.
Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, NIVAC, 252.

Sadly, in the modern Western world of individualism, this community identity seems missing altogether from many churches. The deficit is most remarkable when 12:25–26 is considered. Having shown that God has arranged the body so no part may believe it is more important than another (v. 24), and so that there will be no dissension (v. 25), Paul speaks about the mutual care there should be within the church. It is the staggering claim of v. 26 that surely challenges any church to consider whether, as a people, they have worked at and developed their unity. The proper use of grace-gifts will build up others. They are other focused. It is in that context that each member will come to know others and so "when one member suffers, all the members suffer together" (v. 26). If we do not see others as being able to benefit us and do not feel the need ourselves to benefit others as the Lord has gifted us to do, then we shall never suffer when others suffer since we shall not know their suffering. The members of the body are to be aware of other members and what they are feeling, as well as what they are saying and doing. The closeness of the community described here is the closeness of a good family relationship. The "body" metaphor suggests Paul sees it as even closer than the family metaphor might imply.
- Paul Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, ZECNT, 555–556.

12:27-30 - Encore - Unity Through Diversity

Paul ends by restating his whole point and reasserting the metaphor. *We are individual members of a unified body.* Diversity must be both allowed, and welcomed, even encouraged. We pursue the *Unity of the Spirit that comes only in the Diversity of the Body*

So What Do We do?

So what do we do? We yearn and pray for God to show up, we allow and encourage diversity both in how we serve each other, and in how God choosers to show up, and we leave what God decides to do or not do in his sovereign hands. God chooses what gifts to manifest, and when, and where.

All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.
1 Co 12:11.

All we can do is earnestly and passionately seek him.

How do you know what gift/gifts you have?

We seek to learn what Spiritual gifts God has given us, and then use them to serve one another in the body of Christ. And we pray for God to show up and manifest himself in new gifts. Blomberg stressed the importance of discovering and using your gifts to serve others;

Romans 12:3–8 suggests that determining and then faithfully using one's spiritual gifts is the next most important task in a Christian's life after the fundamental cognitive and moral transformation that accompanies conversion (Rom. 12:1–2). We have already seen how 1 Corinthians 1:7 pointed to gifts as the characteristic expression of each Christian's ministry throughout the church age. Surely then a crucial question for believers in every time and culture is how they determine what their individual gifts are. Various diagnostic tools have been developed, from the relatively simple to the quite sophisticated, and these can be helpful in confirming suspicions and suggesting new possibilities. But most of the church down through history has not had access to these tools, and God can overrule the natural desires or abilities that these various diagnostic tests disclose. So all Christians remain responsible for praying, searching their hearts, trying out ministries, and seeking loving but truthful feedback from mature believers to guide them in ascertaining their distinctive gifts. - Craig Blomberg, 1 Corinthians, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 250–251.

How do you tell what gifts you have? First, jump in bravely. As Ortberg once said, "If you want to walk on water, you've got to step out of the boat." The best suggestion I have seen is to *try everything*. Jump in and serve anywhere you can. Anywhere you see a need. You'll learn pretty quickly, through yourself, and through others, in what specific ways God has enabled you to serve. I would suggests that a gifting reveals itself when two realities come together;

1. You find yourself *passionate* for a particular kind of service
2. You find yourself increasingly *skilled* at a certain kind of service

A true spiritual gifting, will, I think, eventually, display both of these elements; *passion and skill*. Certainly not right away. Growth takes time. But if after repeated attempts, and constantly trying, you find yourself not passionate about a certain expression, even if capable, or, capable in a certain expression, but with little or no growing passion or interest in it, it may be that this is not a gift God has yet given you (which doesn't mean he never will). Giftings reveal themselves most clearly when *both* of these come together, passion *and* skill.

It's also worth noting that passion is usually more *subjectively* realized, while skill is usually more *objectively* realized. Perhaps a better way to say that is that the individual is usually the only one who recognizes the passion for a particular kind of service, while the corporate body must ultimately determine whether a person truly is or is not skilled in a particular way that reveals that God has uniquely gifted them to serve in this way. Such indicators are by no means infallible, but they can be pointers.

Only God Can Make The Wind Blow

At the end of the day, we can learn about and seek spiritual gifts, and manifestations of the Spirit through them, but only God is sovereign in how they are dispersed, and how and when he shows up. I end by borrowing here an illustration from Sam Storms that deeply affected me when I first heard it;

> Imagine that you've decided to go sailing. The problem is that you know next to nothing about sailing! So you go to the store and you purchase several books to find out what's involved. You carefully read them and then you talk to a veteran sailor who answers questions for you. The next day, you rent a sailboat. You examine it closely to make certain that everything needed for a successful sailing experience is present and in good working order. Then, you take your boat out onto the lake. Your excitement is at a fever pitch, though you're also afraid. But you follow the instructions you've read and the counsel received from the experienced sailor, and you launch your boat into the water. You carefully monitor each step and hoist the sail.
>
> At that precise moment you learn a crucial lesson. You can study sailing. You might even be able to build a sailboat. You can seek counsel from the wisest and most veteran of sailors. You can cast your boat onto the most beautiful of lakes under a bright and inviting sun. You can successfully hoist the sail. But—and this is a big "but"—only God can make the wind blow!
>
> You and I can study the Bible. We can learn everything there is to know about spiritual gifts. We can honor and submit ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ. We can orchestrate a worship service according to biblical guidelines. We can do everything that lies in the power of a Christian man or woman. But only the Spirit can make the wind blow! Whether or not the sails fill with a breeze, whether or not the boat moves an inch in the water, is dependent on the will of the sovereign Spirit who blows when and where and however much he pleases. You and I cannot force him to move. Not even our obedience guarantees that the Spirit will do what we have hoped and prayed that he will do.

We cannot compel the presence of the Spirit. We cannot create the operation of a spiritual gift in accordance with biblical standards of conduct. We can obey and pray that the Spirit will be pleased to blow in and through our acts of obedience. If the Spirit chooses not to move, we cannot, indeed we must not, attempt to coerce him. And we should not give up ever trying to sail again because of a calm day when the wind wasn't blowing. Most important of all, don't try to blow into the sail yourself or forget the wind and use paddles instead. That's not sailing.

Remember that the Holy Spirit is a person with a will and with preferences. That's why I use a personal pronoun to describe him. The Holy Spirit wants to be pursued but refuses to be pushed. Never lose sight of the fact that whether or not a particular spiritual gift is manifest and to whom it may or may not be given is entirely up to the Spirit himself. Gifts are bestowed and operate at his discretion, not yours or mine.
- Storms, Sam. *Practicing the Power* (pp. 34-35). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

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